Kinneret Lahad ⓘ

Acquiring a Divine Composure: Singlehood, Excessiveness, and the Changing Gendered Order

Abstract   Singlehood scholars have long noted that single women are often portrayed as leading lonely, empty lives as well as being too selfish, too educated, and too successful. This paper contributes to the growing field of singlehood studies by proposing a theoretical framework that explores these images through the duality of lack and excess as well as the concept of moral panic. By exploring the notions of excessiveness and lack, moral panic, and moral respectability, I explore the new ways in which stigmas of female singlehood are bestowed with discursive force and power. The first part of my chapter examines this conceptualization in the North American and European contexts; the second part scrutinizes these themes further in an Asian context and more specifically, in relation to China's "leftover" ideology.

China's "leftover" discourse illustrates how this category has become a concept through which singlehood, families, and collective national life are imagined. One's status (single or married, with or without children) and age become important axes of signification distinguishing between surplus and non-surplus populations, the condemned and the praised respectively. Accordingly, single women are perceived as personally responsible and accountable for their surplus status and the lack of a man in their lives. Thus, my proposal is that the contemporary global discourse about female singlehood should be explored as a significant discursive site, a place where images of women's autonomies and life choices are circulated and evaluated. In this light, I argue that contemporary studies of female singlehood should be situated in the broader framework of gendered forms of oppression and new modes of subjection.

Keywords   singlehood; leftover discourse; moral panic; excess; lack

Introduction

The opening lines of Manju Kapur's lyrical novel *The Immigrant* depict the protagonist's frame of mind as she approaches her thirtieth birthday:

> Nina was almost thirty. Friend and colleague consoled her by remarking on her radiant complexion and jet black hair, but such comfort was cold. Nina's skin knew it was thirty, broadcasting the fact at certain angles in front of the mirror. Her spirit felt sixty as she walked from the bus stop to the single room where she lived with her mother. Her heart felt a hundred as it surveyed the many years of hopeless longing it had known.
>
> And her womb, her ovaries, her uterus, the unfertilised eggs that were expelled every month, what about them? They were busy marking every passing second of her life.
>
> Had she been married, thirty would have been heralded as a time of youthful maturity, her birthday celebrated in the midst of doting husband and children. A body could feel young in these circumstances, look forward to the gifts, the surprises, the love.
>
> Instead this would be the moment that announced her diminishing prospects to a judgmental world....
>
> ...Hour by inexorable hour, her twenty-ninth year was ebbing away. Tomorrow thirty, thirty, thirty. What brightness could any dawn cast on her existence?[1]

Kapur, a well-known feminist author from India, succinctly captures in this moving extract, many of the themes that underpin the experience of midlife singlehood. One common thread running through many depictions of the single woman of "marriageable age" is the fact that it—singlehood—becomes one's "master status."[2] Here, Nina has succumbed to a specific form of the birthday blues, the age-anchored expectations of marriage still unfulfilled. There is also a hint of existential angst, anchored by physical uncertainty: the fear that, at the age of twenty-nine, she is on the verge of losing the things that are commonly considered to be a woman's social assets: youthful beauty and reproductive potential.

Kapur's observation that if Nina "had been married, thirty would have been heralded as a time of youthful maturity,"[3] is a vivid depiction of what the anthropologist Haim Hazan and I have described as the "accelerated aging process" associated with single women.[4] This symbolic process constructs different timetables and rhythms for older single women, compared

---

1   Manju Kapur, *The Immigrant* (London: Random House, 2008), 5–6.
2   Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 2008), 24–25.
3   Kapur, *The Immigrant,* 5–6.
4   Kinneret Lahad and Haim Hazan, "The Terror of the Single Old Maid: On the Insolubility of a Cultural Category," *Women's Studies International Forum* 47 (2014);

to, for example, the youthful bride and young mother of the future. This construct is a potent example of how we are "aged," boxed in by rigid taxonomies of ability and utility, as well as by culture,[5] which demonstrates how perceptions of the aging process are determined by age norms and social timetables. Thus, single women who have failed to fulfil their potential for marriage and motherhood are deemed to "age faster" than their non-single peers.

This chapter invites the reader to consider anew a set of interrelated questions. Why do these assumptions about age continue to bear such discursive force? How do these popular mediated representations reflect deep–seated assumptions about the social value of the single woman, and how do these interact with patriarchal and family–centered ideological presumptions about the place, character, and self–worth of women—with or without a male partner? I will explore these questions by considering interrelated notions of lack and excess as manifested in conventional representations of female singlehood. I will then move on to examine the role that these notions play in an ongoing global moral panic about the growing population of single people.

The increase in the number of single women in the general population is conceived, as a matter of course, as a threat to men, the gendered social order, and even the strength and future of the nation. The reasons for this are often located within the achievements and the supposedly "rebellious character" of the single woman. Indeed, long–term singlehood is still commonly presented as a negative or an absence: a lack, an incompleteness. The synonyms used to describe single persons—unmarried, unpartnered—define them in terms of what they are not. Singlehood, thus, is commonly conceptualized as a "deficit identity,"[6] indicating a personal deficit and consequently a life of loss and pain.[7]

In popular culture, images and narratives of single life as empty and lonely are ubiquitous. In Hebrew, for example, the etymological root of the word for singlehood is *reik*—emptiness, a void. It is no surprise that many single women seek to distance themselves from these pejoratives. The figure of the single woman is also imagined in terms of excess: a surplus, abject identity embodying excesses in personal character. Single women are labeled as "too educated," "too successful," or "too lazy," which places them out of social bounds. They waste their time and live wasted lives, while their married peers are accumulating time and life achievements.[8] As

---

Kinneret Lahad, *A Table for One: A Critical Reading of Singlehood, Gender, and Time* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

5   Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

6   Jill Reynolds, *The Single Woman: A Discursive Investigation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

7   Anne Byrne, "Singular Identities: Managing Stigma, Resisting Voices," *Women's Studies Review* 7 (2000); Lahad, *A Table for One*; Jan Macvarish, "What is 'the Problem' of Singleness?," *Sociological Research Online* 11, no. 3 (2006).

8   Lahad, *A Table for One*.

such, this identity category of excess is presented as a pathology—based, although not acknowledged as such, on patriarchal and heteronormative timelines and schedules.

The following analysis draws on a variety of global cultural resources, including online columns, films, news headlines, and "expert" advice. From these diverse sources, I attempt to outline the meaning-making processes of singlehood and perceptions of excessiveness and lack. The first part of my chapter examines this conceptualization in the North American and European contexts; the second part explores these themes further in an Asian context. Another goal of this chapter, thus, is to extend the scholarship on singlehood beyond a Western perspective. To accomplish this, I will build on recent scholarly works on female singlehood in Asia and more specifically, on China's "leftover" ideology.

While research on singlehood has flourished over the last two decades, much of this body of literature is overwhelmingly focused on the experiences of the white, urban, and upper-middle-class milieus, paying scant attention to singlehood beyond the North American and European contexts (one notable exception is Japan). Significant steps have been taken to extend the literature on female singlehood in Asia, particularly in China, India, and Japan.[9] These studies have opened a rich mine of knowledge, generating new questions about the lived experience of female singlehood. This body of work stresses the need to adopt an intersectional approach to singlehood, noting that single female identities often intersect with other social axes, including race, sexuality, class, ableness, and geographical location.[10]

---

9 See, for example: Akiko Yoshida, *Unmarried Women in Japan: The Drift into Singlehood* (London: Routledge, 2016); Christiane Brosius, "Regulating Access and Mobility of Single Women in a "World Class"-City: Gender and Inequality in Delhi, India," in *Inequalities in Creative Cities: Issues, Approaches, Comparisons*, ed. U. Gerhard, M. Hoelscher, and D. Wilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Melissa Butcher, "Defying Delhi's Enclosures: Strategies for Managing a Difficult City," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 25, no. 5 (2018); Chow Yiu Fai, *Caring in Times of Precarity: A Study of Single Women Doing Creative Work in Shanghai* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2014); Penn Tsz Ting Ip and Esther Peeren, "Exploiting the Distance between Conflicting Norms: Female Rural-to-Urban Migrant Workers in Shanghai Negotiating Stigma around Singlehood and Marriage," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22, nos. 5–6 (2019); L. Crystal Jiang and Wanqi Gong, "Counteracting Indirect Influence: The Responses of Single Chinese Women to Prejudicial Media Portrayals of Single Womanhood," *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 3 (2016).

10 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Jiang and Gong, "Counteracting Indirect Influence"; Ip and Peeren, "Exploiting the Distance."

The "Bridget Jones generation" and acquiring the divine composure

Over the years that I have researched the conceptualization of female singlehood, I have been continuously surprised to discover the violent and degrading labels still applied to single women around the world.[11] To a large extent, narratives of single women content with this status are scarce, both in academic research and in media culture. "Too selective," "too desperate," "too frustrated," or simply "too lazy" are but a few of the stigmas commonly attached to single women today. Despite the growing population of single people, pejorative expressions like "old maids," "left-over women," "parasite women," and "loser dogs" continue to loom large.[12] Bella DePaulo sees these expressions as a form of "singlism"—a stigma and prejudice directed towards single people.[13]

Stereotypical portrayals of the single woman are rearticulated and incorporated into both explanatory systems and conventional cultural scripts. These are formulated as both scientific and popular quandaries. Examples include the ever-popular rhetorical question, "Why are so many women still single?" and popular advice columns and listicles with headlines like "The top 10 reasons you are still single." The trend, exacerbated by social media discourse, reduces the complexity of everyday experience and knowledge into quizzes, self-tests, and checklists. These self-tests can be construed as a part of the prevailing ethos of therapy and self-help, which, as Eva Illouz has correctly observed, is "characterized by an intense introspectiveness and reflexivity."[14] Indeed, would-be experts present their range of cures for what they consider to be overly extended singlehood. Take, as an example, a popular article entitled "12 Reasons You're Still Single" (CBS News):

> It seems everyone you know is paired off. So how come you're still single? There are lots of possible reasons. Here are 12 biggies from Dr. Amir Levine, a psychiatrist in New York City and the co-author of *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment*.[15]

---

11 Lahad, *A Table for One*.
12 Laura Dales, "Lifestyles of the Rich and Single: Reading Agency in the 'Parasite Single' Issue," in *The Agency of Women in Asia*, ed. Lyn Parker (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005); Fincher, *Leftover Women*; Arianne M. Gaetano, "'Left-over Women': Postponing Marriage and Renegotiating Womanhood in Urban China," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014); Yingchun Ji, "Between Tradition and Modernity: 'Leftover' Women in Shanghai," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 5 (2015); Lahad, *A Table for One*; Eriko Maeda, "Relational Identities of Always-Single Japanese Women," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 25, no. 6 (2008).
13 Bella DePaulo, *Singled Out: How Singles are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).
14 Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 150.
15 CBS, "12 Reasons You're Still Single," *CBS News*, February 9, 2011. Accessed July 5, 2017.

My argument is that an extended singlehood carries with it the label of a problematic and "empty self" in need of being completed and fixed.[16] Extending Philip Cushman's analysis, one sees that these columns and listicles all point to this lack, underpinned by the common assumption that finding a partner is the solution to it.

A similar rhetoric is echoed in the popular American self-help genre, in books bearing titles like *This Is Why You're Single*,[17] *Single No More: Why You're Not Attracting the Partner You Want (And What to Do About It)*,[18] and *If I'm So Wonderful, Why Am I Still Single?*[19] These titles all embody a disruption articulated in personalized terms, endorsing a therapeutic and medicalized rhetoric. It is striking how notions of lack and excess are reformulated into deficient behaviors that do not align with traditional forms of female identity. Continuing this line of analysis, the assumption that "there is a reason why everyone is paired off with a perfect partner except you," becomes an accusation of inadequate self-management; urgent self-transformation is needed, with the goal of fulfilling and completing oneself—with the help of the right partner, of course.

According to this discourse, irresponsible and unbalanced subjectivity can be corrected through careful self-scrutiny and a commitment to self-work. An example of this can be found in the opening scene of the global box-office hit *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which presents a list of resolutions that the eponymous heroine must address in the new year: quit smoking, drink less, lose weight, start a successful career—and get a boyfriend. Her single status is tied here to a lack of self-governance, manifested by her unregulated behavior and dubious personal traits. Indeed, it is these notions of excessiveness and unruliness that emerge as the dominant framework shaping the representations of female singlehood. In the guise of taking control of one's life, it becomes the duty of the single woman to eliminate her excessiveness and to comply with a more restrained and bounded subjectivity. In her seminal work on post-feminism, Angela McRobbie asserts that the figure of Bridget Jones

> portrays the whole spectrum of attributes associated with the self-monitoring subject; she confides in her friends, she keeps a diary, she endlessly reflects on her fluctuating weight, noting her calorie intake, she plans, plots and has projects. She is also deeply uncertain as to what the future holds for her. Despite the choices she has, there are also any number of risks of which she is regularly

---

16 Philip Cushman, "Why the Self Is Empty: Toward a Historically Situated Psychology," *American Psychologist* 45, no. 5 (1990).

17 Laura Lane and Angela Spera, *This Is Why You're Single* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2015).

18 Nick Breau, *Single No More: Why You're Not Attracting the Partner You Want (And What to Do About It)* (self-pub., 2017), Kindle.

19 Susan Page, *If I'm So Wonderful, Why Am I Still Single? Ten Strategies That Will Change Your Love Life Forever* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002).

reminded; the risk that she might let the right man slip from under her nose (hence she must always be on the lookout), the risk that not catching a man at the right time might mean she misses the chance of having children (her biological clock is counting). There is also the risk that partnerless she will be isolated, marginalised from the world of happy couples.[20]

In one memorable scene from *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the guests at a dinner party—where she is the only unpaired person—demand that Bridget account for her status.

Married Man:	You really ought to hurry up and get sprugged up, you know, old girl? Time's a-running out. Tick–tock.
Bridget Jones:	Yes, yes...
Married Man:	Seriously, though. Offices full of single girls in their thirties—fine physical specimens, but they just can't seem to hold down a chap.
Married Woman:	Yes. Why is it there are so many unmarried women in their thirties these days, Bridget?
Bridget Jones:	Oh, I don't know. Suppose it doesn't help that underneath our clothes, our entire bodies are covered in scales (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 2001).[21]

It could be argued that rhetorical statements such as "Why is one *still* single?" or the suggestion that single women are single because they are unable to "hold down a chap," trace out the single woman's inability to follow heteronormative requirements—an inadequacy on her part, in short. The conundrum comes with ancillary questions: Is the single woman too willing—or too unwilling? Is she too picky? Overly fearful? Overly obsessive? Is the single woman an active seeker or a passive one? Is she just lazy—or entirely hopeless? The imperative to understand and improve oneself does not tolerate such traits, which hint at personal excess. The desired subjectivity is dependent upon intensive self-monitoring, which will not allow for any loss of self-control.

Another theme underlying these discursive formations is the issue of panic, specifically "time panic."[22] As Diane Negra claims, "one of the signature attributes of postfeminist culture is its ability to define various female life stages within the parameters of 'time panic.'"[23] In a sense, the social concern surrounding the idea of long-term singlehood (often tantamount

---

20 Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 2004): 261–262.
21 *Bridget Jones's Diary*, directed by Sharon Maguire (United Kingdom: Universal Pictures, 2001).
22 Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009).
23 Negra, *What a Girl Wants*, 47.

to moral panic, as I will discuss later) is mediated through the discursive categories of free will and self-control, which sketch out neoliberal trajectories of normative life scripts.

In my research on singlehood,[24] I have argued that these representations should not be brushed off as merely witty anecdotes typical of popular culture, lacking in actual substance. Rather, they should be engaged with seriously, as discursive constructs illuminating how power relations, forms of knowledge, and female subjectivities are constituted and reified. Within this context, in her study on singlehood in popular culture, Anthea Taylor presents another astute analysis of the stigmatization of professional and highly-educated single women.[25] She contends that the common representation of the single woman is as a figure of discursive unease, conceptualized as both a professional success and a personal failure.[26] Building on Taylor's observation, my study here examines how the interplay of lack and excess lends more discursive heft to these sexist and patriarchal modes of representations. Bridget Jones's new-year resolutions also refer to specific threats of overflow and lack, liable to becoming tangible, if one does not subscribe to the gendered norms of respectable femininity. As such, the body of the single woman represents an excess of wrong habits and traits. Hence, I suggest that this very interplay presents single women as bearers of an *unbalanced subjectivity.* In the next section, I explore these themes in relation to the discursive construct of the "leftover" single woman in China.

"Leftover women" as excessive and lacking subjectivities

As an Israeli scholar writing about singlehood mainly in the Israeli and Anglo-American contexts, I have followed the unrestrained preoccupation of mass media in the Western world with singlehood in Asian countries, with growing unease—due to the somewhat essentialized and exotic depictions that characterize these portrayals. From such coverage in English and Hebrew, it has become evident to me that unmarried Asian women—mainly Chinese and Japanese single women—have become subjects of popular media attention in the West. Beyond the general fascination with singlehood, this expansive coverage may also be attributable to the general allure that East Asia holds for these forms of mass media. Even a small sample of headlines illustrates this trend. Take the examples of headlines which have been appearing in the *Quartz,* for example, "China's

---

24 See Kinneret Lahad, "'Am I Asking for Too Much?' The Selective Single Woman as a New Social Problem," *Women's Studies International Forum*, no. 40 (September 2013); Kinneret Lahad, "The Single Woman's Choice as a Zero-Sum Game," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 2 (March 2014); Lahad, *A Table for One*.
25 Anthea Taylor, *Single Women in Popular Culture: The Limits of Postfeminism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
26 Taylor, *Single Women in Popular Culture*.

marriage rate is plummeting because women are choosing autonomy over intimacy,"[27] the *BBC News Online Magazine*, such as "China's 'leftover women,' unmarried at 27,"[28] or, of late (August 2019), in the *New York Times*—"Craving Freedom, Japan's Women Opt Out of Marriage".[29]

In what follows, I want to go beyond these catchy headlines and offer some theoretical observations about one of the most discussed topics in media coverage of single women in Asia today: the "leftover" single women of China. I will explore the ways in which this category is constructed and how these relate to popular representations of feminine subjectivity and feminine excess. The term "leftover women" was coined by the Chinese government in 2007 in an attempt to pressurize single women into getting married by condemning them for being too picky, or for lacking the attributes essential to catching the right partner. Targeting urban, educated women in their late twenties, the campaign was underpinned by the imperative of addressing the demographic gender imbalance created by China's decades-long official one-child policy,[30] which resulted in extreme sex discrimination in favor of male offspring and the elective abortion of female fetuses.

Existing scholarship on this issue attests to the symbolic violence underlying these mediated messages.[31] Hannah Feldshuh frames the "leftover" category as a "discursive construction" by the media. She writes:

> My study approaches "shengnü" ["leftover women"] not as an accepted demographic reality with a causal explanation, but as a process of discursive media construction. As a construction, this concept reflects more about the motives of the Chinese society than the status of "leftover women" themselves.[32]

---

27 Xuan Li, "China's Marriage Rate Is Plummeting Because Women Are Choosing Autonomy over Intimacy," *Quartz*, October 13, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2023. https://qz.com/808617/chinas-marriage-rate-is-plummeting-because-women-are-choosing-autonomy-over-partnership.

28 Mary Kay Magistad, "China's 'Leftover Women,' Unmarried at 27," *BBC News Online Magazine*, February 21, 2013. Accessed June 30, 2023. https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21320560.

29 Motoko Rich, "Craving Freedom, Japan's Women Opt Out of Marriage," *The New York Times*, August 3, 2019. Accessed July 2, 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/world/asia/japan-single-women-marriage.html.

30 Fincher, *Leftover Women*.

31 See Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Hannah Feldshuh, "Gender, Media, and Myth-Making: Constructing China's Leftover Women," *Asian Journal of Communication* 28, no. 1 (2018); Fincher, *Leftover Women*; Luzhou Li, "'If You Are the One': Dating Shows and Feminist Politics in Contemporary China," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5 (2015); Jun Zhang and Peidong Sun, "'When Are You Going to Get Married?': Parental Matchmaking and Middle-Class Women in Contemporary Urban China," in *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers: Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis and Sara L. Friedman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

32 Feldshuh, "Gender, Media, Myth-Making," 39.

In a similar vein, Jun Zhang and Peidong Sun correctly argue that the term is sexist in itself, as it is only directed at single women and not at single men.[33] They note that although the term "surplus men" is used to describe poor, unmarried men from rural China, it does not extend to the archetypal single urban man—men who instead are described as "golden bachelors" and "diamond single men."[34] Exploring this context further, it is important to note that the "leftover" category does not apply to all Chinese women in the same way. As L. Crystal Jiang and Wanqi Gong contend, in order to understand the oppression of single women, one must pay careful attention to the specific social structure in which it takes place.[35] Penn Tsz Ting Ip and Esther Peeren exemplify this when writing about the experiences of rural-to-urban migrant women in China.[36] In their insightful work, they underscore the importance of migration and citizenship status in negotiating the potential stigma of singlehood. Rural migrant women, for example, feel excluded from Shanghai's "marriage market" because of their provincial origins.[37]

These scholarly contributions assist in shifting our attention from the "leftover" category itself to the ideological regimes and discourses that produced it. One example is the numeric demographic discourse, along with its casual explanations. This lends the discourse on "the time left" for "leftover" women a seemingly neutral and deterministic tone, while, in fact, obscuring its sexist and ageist undertones. This very discourse pivots around numbers, statistics, and the pseudo-neutrality of the dating market, and it is expressed in tones of urgency and determinacy. It corresponds to what Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li call a "demographic reductionism"—"the assumption that demographic processes are the sole determinants of how the situation unfolds."[38]. According to Srinivasan and Li, demographic reductionism has severely limited engagement with the implications of the sex ratio imbalance in China and India.[39]

As I have argued elsewhere,[40] the marriage market is represented as a place with its own laws and dynamics that determine ("objectively") the social and temporal value of women. Through the integration of the age-graded, market-based rationality, the social and *temporal* worth of single women are constantly measured and evaluated. Drawing on Sarah

---

33 Zhang and Sun, "Parental Matchmaking," 125.
34 Zhang and Sun, "Parental Matchmaking," 125.
35 L. Crystal Jiang and Wanqi Gong, "Understanding Single Womanhood in China: An Intersectional Perspective," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality in Public Policy*, ed. Olena Hankivsky and Julia S. Jordan-Zachery (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
36 Ip and Peeren, "Exploiting the Distance."
37 Ip and Peeren, "Exploiting the Distance," 672.
38 Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li, "Unifying Perspectives on Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India," in *Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India: Macro Demographics versus Local Dynamics*, ed. Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li (Cham: Springer, 2018), 8.
39 Srinivasan and Li, "Unifying Perspectives," 8.
40 Lahad, *A Table for One*.

Sharma's conceptualization of temporalities and temporal worth, I suggest that her reflections are relevant for understanding the ideological production of the "leftover" category:

> Temporalities are not times; like continually broken clocks, they must be reset again and again. They are expected to recalibrate and fit into a larger temporal order. Temporalities do not experience a uniform time but rather a time particular to the labor that produces them. Their experience of time depends on where they are positioned within a larger economy of temporal worth. The temporal subject's living day, as part of its livelihood, includes technologies of the self contrived for synchronizing to the time of others or having others synchronize to them. The meaning of these subjects' own times and experiences of time is in large part structured and controlled by both the institutional arrangements they inhabit and the time of others—other temporalities.[41]

While Sharma's work relates to the temporalities of neoliberal economies, her analysis also sheds light on the ideological structuring of time and the ways in which both she and other women must synchronize their life schedules with the collective rhythms imposed by the state. A woman's personal, temporal trajectory and livelihood are subsumed by the grand ideology, which has condemned them to "surplus lives"[42] or "wasted lives".[43] Existing research has shown the role played by state-run media organs in promoting and perpetuating these messages. A corresponding issue that arises from these studies is that the image of "leftover women" has, in itself, become a marketable commodity—a commodity that can be bartered in popular entertainment markets like dating shows, magazine websites, expert advice, and matchmaking services available in abundance.[44]

Luzhou Li notes that hashtags like "#areyouleftover" are increasingly visible in social media discourse.[45] This could be seen as a form of self-quantification and inadequacy, attesting to the power of the larger temporal social order. This form of self-reflection can also be seen as a form of self-interrogation— Do I fit in? Can I fit in? What is my social worth? How do I measure against time?—these all demonstrate how the "leftover" ideology plays out even on the most intimate of scales. In this way, the "leftover" campaign also demonstrates the dominance of the state in shaping and reproducing gender inequalities.[46] Ken Plummer's

---

41 Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.
42 Craig Willse, "Surplus Life: The Neoliberal Making and Managing of Housing Insecurity," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2010).
43 Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
44 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Li, "If You Are the One."
45 Li, "If You Are the One."
46 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Fincher, *Leftover Women*.

take of intimate citizenship[47] can be useful for understanding the effects of the idea of women as leftovers. He defines citizenship as a 'cluster of emerging concerns over the rights to choose what we do with our bodies, our feelings, our identities, our relationships, our genders, our eroticisms and our representations".[48] The state dictates the possibilities for "intimate citizenship" and thus, the rights of women to determine how they organize their intimate life and stake their own intimate identity.[49] According to Plummer, "intimate citizenship" is also about belonging to a place, context, or time, where "the personal invades the public and the public invades the personal."[50] The "leftover" campaign sends a clear message regarding the consequences of becoming a surplus citizen. It indicates that single women are not a part of the collective order, and that, at the same time, they threaten to destabilize it. Thus, public campaigns like this one place the responsibility for the demographic crisis on single women. Once again, women's bodies and personal lives are held responsible for the future of the nation. In other words, these new and old discursive strategies also reinforce the notion of the single woman as a threat to society, and reiterate the understanding that women's bodies and life trajectories should be controlled and publicly monitored.

Another common assertion is that the single woman is too greedy and overly materialistic.[51] A few years ago, local and global media explored in detail a reality TV scandal in China. A female contestant on the show *If You Are the One* declared: "I'd rather cry in a BMW than smile on a bicycle".[52] The ensuing scandal also caught the attention of scholars writing about singlehood in China, who pointed out, that in the wake of the scandal, China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) implemented a series of regulations requiring dating programs to carry out background checks on potential participants and to curb references to material wealth.[53]

Interestingly, the "BMW girl" scandal led to public debates, including discussions on gender representations and dating issues.[54] The blame that was heaped on the contestant in this case for being too greedy, is reminiscent of the heated debate in Japan, that followed the publication of

---

47 Ken Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).
48 Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship*, 17.
49 Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship.*
50 Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship*, 68.
51 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*.
52 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Shaohua Guo, "When Dating Shows Encounter State Censors: A Case Study of *If You Are the One*," *Media, Culture & Society* 39, no. 4 (2017), 487–503; Li, "If You Are the One"; Wanning Sun, "From Poisonous Weeds to Endangered Species: Shenghuo TV, Media Ecology, and Stability Maintenance," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44, no. 2 (2015), 17–37.
53 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Guo, "When Dating Shows Encounter State Censors."
54 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Guo, "When Dating Shows Encounter State Censors."

Masahiro Yamada's book *After Parasite Singles*.[55] In his book, the author claimed that single women were spoiled, choosing to live a pampered life at home with their parents and preferring a luxurious and materialistic lifestyle.[56] Single women were also criticized for their excessive consumption. Critical scholars writing about singlehood in Japan and elsewhere point out, that this attitude is inherently sexist and places the blame for Japan's economic and demographic difficulties squarely on women's shoulders.[57] Laura Dales writes that "Yamada's simplification and feminisation of this trend reinscribes notions of unmarried women as selfish, irresponsible and materialistic."[58] The common use of terms like "BMW girl" and "parasite women" indicates the widespread consensus about this supposed greediness as another realm of excessiveness— out of bounds, and therefore, a threat to the moral fabric of society.

One affective outcome of this ideology is a growing sense of failure; the sense that one lacks agency and thus, control over one's destiny. I would like to add to this scholarship by arguing that the violence embedded in this humiliating labeling is conveyed by depicting a feminine subjectivity characterized by lack (not married) and excess (surplus subjectivity). Indeed, prevailing representations of feminine excess have long been used as a means of limiting women's space, behavior, and sexuality.[59] Feminist scholars have contended that the superfluous femininity of women who are "too much" cannot be contained; thus, it must be regulated and controlled. In the case of the "leftover" narrative, such a label is used to ridicule and discipline this rebellious excessiveness. In a related vein, the hashtag "#areyouleftover?" can also be interpreted as an act of recognition—recognition of the excessiveness in oneself and in others.

Thus, being tagged as "leftover" marks a transgression of the socio-temporal order, and accordingly, marks one out as a threat to society in general. When features on state-run media outlets discuss the dating prospects of individual women,[60] they tend to highlight personal stories underscoring women's own responsibility for their single status.[61] We can see this

---

55 Masahiro Yamada, *After Parasite Singles: The Real Story Behind Japan's Marriage Crisis* (Na: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2014).

56 Dales, "Lifestyles of the Rich."

57 Dales, "Lifestyles of the Rich"; DePaulo, *Singled Out*; Yoshida, *Unmarried Women in Japan*.

58 Laura Dales, "*Ohitorisama*, Singlehood and Agency in Japan." *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 225.

59 Lahad, "The Selective Single Woman"; Annukka Lahti, "Too Much? Excessive Sexual Experiences in Bisexual Women's Life Stories," *Subjectivity* 11, no. 1 (March 2018); Laurie Schulze, "On the Muscle," in *Building Bodies*, ed. Pamela L. Moore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

60 Feldshuh, "Gender, Media, Myth-Making"; Wei Luo and Zhen Sun, "Are You the One? China's TV Dating Shows and the Sheng Nü's Predicament," *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 2 (2015).

61 Wanqi Gong, Caixie Tu, and L. Crystal Jiang, "Stigmatized Portrayals of Single Women: A Content Analysis of News Coverage on Single Women and Single Men in China," *Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017); Jiang and Gong, "Understanding Single Womanhood."

discourse articulated in an individualized, personalized, and decontextu-
alized language. However, the scholarship on singlehood in contemporary
China shows how this category has been produced by a constellation of
global and national forces, with some in conflict and others in cooperation.
These forces include the neoliberal global market economies of work and
consumer culture, together with traditional family values, Confucian val-
ues, and a patriarchal outlook on gender relations.

In his intriguing study on single women working in Shanghai's creative
industry, Yiu Fai Chow examines the meeting point between a particular
mix of Confucian values, heterosexual ideals, and global images of wom-
anhood.[62] These often combine to create the heightened social pressures
that many Chinese single women feel themselves to be subjected to. As
Chow writes:

> The pressure manifests itself in many forms, most commonly when
> parents—usually mothers, as recounted by the single women—
> would privately enquire about their love life, with the more-or-less
> explicit mission of persuading or even coercing unmarried daugh-
> ters into seeing someone. The most interventionist, often violent,
> manner is *xiangqin*. A term that finds its way into almost all of my
> conversations with the single women, *xiangqin* refers to practices
> involving gatherings arranged by parents, other family members,
> friends, or professional matchmakers, for single men and women
> to meet, hopefully leading to dating and marriage.[63]

The practice of *xiangqin* (blind dates) is carried out by parents, relatives,
professional matchmakers—and is even sponsored by the government at
times.[64] State-run media also plays a role in these matchmaking services,
through the promotion of (admittedly) extremely popular dating shows.
As Chow points out, pressure comes in many forms.[65] It fuses the personal
with an official language that foregrounds issues of personal blame, famil-
ial relations, and national concerns.

Another focal point in the "leftover women" campaign is the sugges-
tion that single women are being too selective, urging them to lower their
expectations. However, selectiveness in this case is also rooted in heter-
onormative schedules, which themselves limit choices. When selective-
ness is ascribed to a single woman over the age of twenty-seven, as is
the case in China, it is a reconfiguration of a position, which at an earlier
phase of life, could have just as well signified agency and choice. Now,
however, it implies excessiveness, as well as the lack of self-control and
social respectability. Thus, when the "leftover" category is presented as an

---

62 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*.
63 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*, 155.
64 Luo and Sun, "Are You the One."
65 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*.

ongoing social crisis endangering "harmonious society," it reflects a socially conservative politics seeking to restore patriarchal control.[66] Excessiveness is wielded rhetorically as a tool for the regulation of women's autonomy, and to encourage her subjection to a particular social order.

The threat of ejection from the marriage market can be particularly offensive and humiliating. This derogatory status renders the single woman a figure destined for a "surplus" and "wasted" life, excluded and abandoned by society. This institutional violence is also articulated in moral terms, where the single woman is portrayed as defying accepted (and acceptable) norms of female respectability and social stability.

Singlehood, fear, and moral panic

The rhetoric of singlehood as a problem, along with its individualized explanations ("she is too selective," for example, or the quasi-explanation that she "falls for the wrong kind of men"), favors personal accountability over socio-political contextualization. From this perspective, single women are themselves to blame for their ineptness and for their excessive expectations from men. The inherent flaws of the single woman require drastic measures. This tone is well-demonstrated in contemporary global media, which produces and echoes postfeminist and conservative messages.[67]

It is no surprise that feminist analysts view Bridget Jones as a postfeminist icon, "a recognizable emblem of a particular kind of femininity."[68] Taylor suggests that Bridget Jones has become the epitome of what single women dread. Quoting a feature in the British newspaper, *The Independent*, Taylor references a Tory politician who claimed that the "'Bridget Jones' generation of career women," struggling to settle down and start a family, "is driving the breakdown of British society."[69] The rhetoric of the "Bridget Jones generation" resonates globally. In Japan, according to *The Telegraph*, "single women were once best known for their love of shoes and handbags. Now the country's Bridget Jones generation is snapping up special female-friendly flats as well."[70]

---

66 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*.
67 Kinneret Lahad and Avi Shoshana, "Singlehood in Treatment: Interrogating the Discursive Alliance between Postfeminism and Therapeutic Culture," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 3 (2015); Rosalind Gill, "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising," *Feminism and Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2008); Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Taylor, *Single Women in Popular Culture*.
68 Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 227.
69 Taylor, *Single Women in Popular Culture*, 98.
70 Colin Joyce, "Single Women Fuel Craze for 'Female-Friendly' Flats in Japan," *The Telegraph*, June 3, 2005. Accessed June 30, 2023. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/1491324/Single-women-fuel-craze-for-female-friendly-flats-in-Japan.html?onwardjourney=584162_v3.

One major concern that this conservative perspective engenders—a concern accentuated by the global reach of social media—is that this current generation is to blame for the breakdown of the traditional family, and that, it thereby poses a serious demographic threat to the future of the nation. Thus, the "leftover woman" becomes a cautionary tale, an imminent threat to the moral fabric of society. The geographic extent of this violent imagery is astounding. We can see how this figure of unbalanced and out-of-control subjectivity manifests in China's conceptualization of "leftover women". These headlines correspond to prevailing interpretations of ideas that are presented as demographical truths, especially that of a uniform image of middle-class and educated single women, who are unmarried, and therefore, untrustworthy citizens.

Descriptors such as the "Bridget Jones generation," the "leftover" women of China, and the "parasites" of Japan are old-new mediated categories, invented and discursively distributed by governmental and media agencies. As Chow comments, the generational paradigm is paramount when discussing single women in China, as is evident in the ways that the participants in his study spoke about themselves.[71] He suggests that this is a way to talk about oneself and others in a collective manner. Here, I would argue that the generational paradigm is used to convey heightened levels of collective concern and bleak demographic scenarios. In what follows, I suggest that this generational paradigm, along with its alarmist representations of the future, is intensified through exaggerated fear-mongering and reactionary moral messages.

In her work on single women in China, Luzhou Li argues that the discourse on singlehood is a subliminal expression of moral panic, engendered by the growing liberation of highly educated professional women from the domestic sphere.[72] She claims that:

> The incitement of discourses by a variety of social institutions including family and media creates a social fear among women that they will become spinsters if they cannot get married before the age of 30, thereby bringing into play the working of power, which effectively regulates single women who choose not to take on domestic responsibility at the expense of their professional pursuits right away.[73]

Lisa Eklund develops this line of analysis by drawing on Stanley Cohen's seminal research on moral panic, which drew on perceptions of street crime in England during the 1970s.[74] According to Eklund, the "leftover woman"

---

71 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*.
72 Li, "'If You Are the One,'" 525.
73 Li, "'If You Are the One': Dating Shows and Feminist Politics in Contemporary China," 525.
74 Lisa Eklund, "The Sex Ratio Question and the Unfolding of a Moral Panic? Notions of Power, Choice, and Self in Mate Selection among Women and Men in Higher

stands at the center of a moral panic in China. One of the ramifications of this panic is that single women are scapegoated and subjected to public hostility. The creation of social anxieties has intensified the urgency to marry.[75] I wish to extend these interesting observations by drawing the reader's attention to the recurring motifs of these discourses, such as the fear of dying alone, and the familial and collective language in which they are presented. I agree with Eklund's contention that these popular narratives cast single women as "folk devils"[76] accountable for endangering the moral fabric of society. In this way, the narratives project collective fears of aging and loneliness, as well as the "inherent" strength and unity of the family. Take for example, the following article published by the BBC:

> One of the greatest fears of Chinese parents is coming true: China's young people are turning away from marriage. The trend is also worrying the government....
>   But in a culture that puts great value on family, parents are alarmed by even the tiniest likelihood that their offspring will remain unmarried and childless. They fear the breaking of family lineage, or that there will be no one to look after their unmarried children when they're gone.[77]

Unpacking this linkage of phenomena and outcome results in the conclusion that not only is the single woman harming herself, but she is additionally portrayed as deficient in morality, accused of respecting neither her parents nor the collective common good. Accounts of this nature tend to be coupled with the notion of singlehood as defying the set idea of the good and respectable daughter. Here we see yet another example of singlehood conceived as a morally charged category, evaluated through binary distinctions of good and bad, right and wrong, respectable and non-respectable. Drawing upon a rhetoric of risk and blame, single women are presented as "folk devils", posing a threat to the well-being of their families, their communities, and the nation. These dramatic narratives confirm Cohen's revealing assumption that moral panics are products of cultural strain and ambiguity.[78] Such discourses, he asserts, are intensified by the fundamental demographic changes which invariably underlie them and which create a fertile territory for sensationalism in media accounts and political rhetoric.

Education in China," in *Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India: Macro Demographics versus Local Dynamics*, ed. Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li (Cham: Springer, 2018); Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee Ltd., 1972).

75 Eklund, "The Sex Ratio Question"; Fincher, *Leftover Women*.

76 Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.

77 Xuan Li, "Why People Aren't Getting Married in China," *BBC*, August 5, 2017. Accessed July 7, 2023. https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170804-why-people-arent-getting-married-in-china.

78 Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.

Indeed, an abundance of media articles circulate dire predictions about "the problem" of single women. This is, in fact, another way of decontextualizing the socio-economic factors contributing to the declining fertility rates—the high cost of living and a refusal to submit to patriarchal norms. As Maya Heins puts it, "Much of the blame for the falling birth and marriage rates in the country is being placed on single women. However in reality, it is a complex set of cultural and economic factors that are responsible for the diminishing fertility rate."[79]

Another form of moral panic attached to singlehood is the narrative of aging and dying alone. Neta Yodovich and Kinneret Lahad show how the stigma of the single woman as an "old maid" can fuel moral panic.[80] Our analysis demonstrates how long-term singlehood is associated with a lonely—and therefore terrifying—social existence. Indeed, one could claim that the "old maid" figure threatens, by its very presence, social values and the collective social good.[81] All these narratives cast the single woman as a "folk devil" responsible for endangering the moral fabric of society.

These notions establish the extent to which this rhetoric depicts and rewards (or punishes) women's life choices, and they cohere with what Adrienne Rich describes as "compulsory heterosexuality".[82] This logic promotes the assumption that the status and social worth of women are dependent upon and defined in terms of their relationships with men, or, alternatively, the conviction that the primary role of a woman is to care for family members. In a sense, these narratives constantly question women's claims to autonomy, casting aspersions on the supposedly suspicious and immoral experience of living alone.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this study has deconstructed some of the deeply rooted assumptions and understandings of singlehood. Singlehood, as it emerges here, is still, largely perceived as a transitory and temporary life phase, a prelude to marriage and motherhood, and nothing more. Accordingly, when singlehood extends for longer than expected, the ensuing implication is that there is an urgent need for self-transformation, in order to find the "right one." Above a certain age, singlehood constitutes—contradictorily—both a lack and an uncontained excess.

---

79 Maya Heins, "Going Solo: A Qualitative Comparison of Single Women in Japan and Colombia," (Undergraduate Honors Thesis, University of Colorado (Boulder), 2017), 7.
80 Neta Yodovich and Kinneret Lahad, "'I Don't Think This Woman Had Anyone in Her Life': Loneliness and Singlehood in Six Feet Under." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 4 (2018).
81 Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 9.
82 Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980).

By exploring the notions of excessiveness and lack, moral panic, and moral respectability, I have attempted to shape an understanding of the new ways in which patriarchy is bestowed with discursive force and power. Thus, my proposal is that the contemporary global discourse about female singlehood should be explored as a significant discursive site, a place where images of women's autonomies and life choices are circulated and evaluated. In this light, I argue that contemporary studies of female singlehood should be situated in the broader framework of gendered forms of oppression and new forms of subjection. As we see here, the very personal and decontextualized forms through which singlehood is discussed, underscores the need to extend the conceptual framework of this field.

China's "leftover" discourse illustrates how this category has become a concept with which singlehood, families, and collective national life are imagined. One's status (single or married, with or without children) and age become important axes of signification, distinguishing between surplus and non–surplus populations, the condemned and the praised respectively. Accordingly, single women are perceived as personally responsible and accountable for their surplus status. The category of the single woman is embedded in prevailing conceptions of an essentialized and normalizing gendered social order, an order that underscores conservative sets of assumptions and reinforces the resurgence of gender inequalities. From this perspective, couple culture and the cult of motherhood exemplify the promise of the aspired and moral life trajectory. However, the study of singlehood should not be restricted to exploring the lives of single women alone; it can also reveal a story about social assumptions of good and respected female subjects and the desired social order. Bearing this in mind, studying singlehood has wider theoretical and empirical implications beyond conceptualizations of singlehood alone. As Srinivasan and Li state in their study of macro demographics and local dynamics in China and India:

> The core of the problem is gender discrimination; analyses will have to address key elements shaping gender discrimination and the implications of the impacts of female deficit and male surplus at the very least for women's wellbeing, gender relations, patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities.[83]

The brutality of this discourse in China, India, and elsewhere is an important reminder of why demographic reductionism should not be accepted as a given. One way of challenging this creeping orthodoxy is by theorizing the study of singlehood across different disciplines and geographical locations. My purpose in this chapter has been not just to offer a critical account of singlehood, but also to develop new conceptual and political possibilities for thinking about women's life trajectories and alternative gendered orders: a line of thought relevant to this book. Exploring singlehood in Asia

---

83 Srinivasan and Li, "Unifying Perspectives," 10.

is a new and much-needed field of research with the potential to revital-
ize this field of study. Singlehood presents a unique prism through which
macro-social processes and social changes in Asia—and elsewhere—can
be re–evaluated and, hopefully, continuously challenged.

These contributions create a critical space for the voices and experi-
ences of single women and thus, support a much-needed intersectional
perspective for studying singlehood. What is clear from the accounts that
populate this chapter is the importance of moving beyond a one-dimen-
sional definition of singlehood, shifting our scholarly gaze to multiple sites
of inequalities and privileges. As a number of scholars studying single-
hood in Asia have shown, singlehood cannot be studied as distinct from
the intersections of class, race, civil status, profession, and age.[84] From this
viewpoint, the subject position of the single woman is constructed through
multiple positions of oppressions and privileges that are rooted in sexism,
marriage norms, ageism, and patriarchy.

ORCID®

Kinneret Lahad ⬤ https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1266-8457

References

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Hoboken, NJ: John
Wiley & Sons, 2013.
Becker, Howard S. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Simon &
Schuster, 2008.
Breau, Nick. *Single No More: Why You're Not Attracting the Partner You Want (And What
to Do About It)*. Self-published, 2017.
Brosius, Christiane. "Regulating Access and Mobility of Single Women in a "World
Class"-City: Gender and Inequality in Delhi, India." In *Inequalities in Creative
Cities: Issues, Approaches, Comparisons*, edited by U. Gerhard, M. Hoelscher,
and D. Wilson, 239–260. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
Butcher, Melissa. "Defying Delhi's Enclosures: Strategies for Managing a Difficult
City." *Gender, Place, and Culture* 25, no. 5 (2017): 727–742. https://doi.org/10.
1080/0966369X.2017.1395823.
Byrne, Anne. "Singular Identities: Managing Stigma, Resisting Voices." *Women's
Studies Review*, 7 (2000): 13–24.
CBS. "12 Reasons You're Still Single." *CBS News*, February 9, 2011. Accessed July 5,
2017.
Chow, Yiu Fai. *Caring in Times of Precarity: A Study of Single Women Doing Creative
Work in Shanghai*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

---

84 Chow, *Caring in Times of Precarity*; Jiang and Gong, "Counteracting Indirect
Influence."

Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers.* London: MacGibbon and Kee Ltd., 1972.

Cushman, Philip. "Why the Self Is Empty: Toward a Historically Situated Psychology." *American Psychologist* 45, no. 5 (1990): 599–611. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.45.5.599.

Dales, Laura. "Lifestyles of the Rich and Single: Reading Agency in the 'Parasite Single' Issue." In *The Agency of Women in Asia*, edited by Lyn Parker, 133–157. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005.

Dales, Laura. "*Ohitorisama*, Singlehood and Agency in Japan." *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 224–242. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2014.902033.

DePaulo, Bella. *Singled Out: How Singles are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006.

Eklund, Lisa. "The Sex Ratio Question and the Unfolding of a Moral Panic? Notions of Power, Choice, and Self in Mate Selection among Women and Men in Higher Education in China." In *Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India: Macro Demographics versus Local Dynamics*, edited by Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li, 105–125. Cham: Springer, 2018.

Feldshuh, Hannah. "Gender, Media, and Myth–Making: Constructing China's Leftover Women." *Asian Journal of Communication* 28, no. 1 (2018): 38–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2017.1339721.

Fincher, Leta Hong. *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 2014.

Gaetano, Arianne M. "'Leftover Women': Postponing Marriage and Renegotiating Womanhood in Urban China." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 124–149.

Genz, Stéphanie, and Benjamin A. Brabon. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Gill, Rosalind. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

Gill, Rosalind. "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising." *Feminism and Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2008): 35–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353507084950.

Gong, Wanqi, Caixie Tu, and L. Crystal Jiang. "Stigmatized Portrayals of Single Women: A Content Analysis of News Coverage on Single Women and Single Men in China." *Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017): 197–211, https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1095082.

Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by Culture*. London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Guo, Shaohua. "When Dating Shows Encounter State Censors: A Case Study of *If You Are the One*." *Media, Culture & Society* 39, no. 4 (2017): 487–503. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716648492.

Heins, Maya. "Going Solo: A Qualitative Comparison of Single Women in Japan and Colombia." Undergraduate Honors Thesis, University of Colorado (Boulder), 2017. https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/undergraduate_honors_theses/h128nd97r.

Illouz, Eva. *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. Los-Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2008.

Ip, Penn Tsz Ting, and Esther Peeren. "Exploiting the Distance between Conflicting Norms: Female Rural-to-Urban Migrant Workers in Shanghai Negotiating Stigma around Singlehood and Marriage." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22, nos. 5–6 (2019): 665–683.

Ji, Yingchun. "Between Tradition and Modernity: 'Leftover' Women in Shanghai." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 5 (2015): 1057–1073. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24582721.

Jiang, L. Crystal, and Wanqi Gong. "Counteracting Indirect Influence: The Responses of Single Chinese Women to Prejudicial Media Portrayals of Single Womanhood." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 3 (2016): 215–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2016.1143852.

Jiang, L. Crystal, and Wanqi Gong. "Understanding Single Womanhood in China: An Intersectional Perspective." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality in Public Policy*, edited by Olena Hankivsky and Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, 287–307. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Joyce, Colin. "Single Women Fuel Craze for 'Female-Friendly' Flats in Japan." *The Telegraph*, June 3, 2005. Accessed June 30, 2023. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/1491324/Single-women-fuel-craze-for-female-friendly-flats-in-Japan.html?onwardjourney=584162_v3.

Kapur, Manju. *The Immigrant*. London: Random House, 2008.

Lahad, Kinneret. *A Table for One: A Critical Reading of Singlehood, Gender, and Time*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.

Lahad, Kinneret. "'Am I Asking for Too Much?' The Selective Single Woman as a New Social Problem." *Women's Studies International Forum*, no. 40 (September 2013): 23–32. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.04.009.

Lahad, Kinneret. "The Single Woman's Choice as a Zero-Sum Game." *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 2 (March 2014): 240–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.798341.

Lahad, Kinneret, and Haim Hazan. "The Terror of the Single Old Maid: On the Insolubility of a Cultural Category." *Women's Studies International Forum* 47 (2014): 127–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.08.001.

Lahad, Kinneret, and Avi Shoshana. "Singlehood in Treatment: Interrogating the Discursive Alliance between Postfeminism and Therapeutic Culture." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 3 (2015): 334–349. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506815580398.

Lahti, Annukka. "Too Much? Excessive Sexual Experiences in Bisexual Women's Life Stories." *Subjectivity* 11, no. 1 (March 2018): 21–39. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41286-017-0042-x.

Lane, Laura, and Angela Spera. *This Is Why You're Single*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2015.

Li, Luzhou. "'If You Are the One': Dating Shows and Feminist Politics in Contemporary China." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5 (2015): 519–535. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877914538906.

Li, Xuan. "China's Marriage Rate Is Plummeting Because Women Are Choosing Autonomy over Intimacy." *Quartz*, October 13, 2016. Accessed June 30, 2023. https://qz.com/808617/chinas–marriage–rate–is–plummeting–because–women–are–choosing–autonomy–over–partnership/.

Li, Xuan. "Why People Aren't Getting Married in China." *BBC*, August 5, 2017. Accessed July 7, 2023. https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/2017 0804-why-people-arent-getting-married-in-china.

Luo, Wei, and Zhen Sun. "Are You the One? China's TV Dating Shows and the Sheng Nü's Predicament." *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 2 (2015): 239–256.

Macvarish, Jan. "What is 'the Problem' of Singleness?" *Sociological Research Online* 11, no. 3 (2006): 81–88.

Maeda, Eriko. "Relational Identities of Always-Single Japanese Women." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 25, no. 6 (2008): 967–987. https://doi. org/10.1177/0265407508100310.

Magistad, Mary Kay. "China's 'Leftover Women,' Unmarried at 27." *BBC News Online Magazine*, February 21, 2013. Accessed June 30, 2023. https://www.bbc. com/news/magazine-21320560.

Maguire, Sharon, dir. *Bridget Jones's Diary* [Motion picture]. Produced by Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, and Jonathan Cavendish. United Kingdom: Universal Pictures, 2001.

McRobbie, Angela. "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture." *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 2004): 255–264. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10. 1080/1468077042000309937.

Negra, Diane. *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009.

Page, Susan. *If I'm So Wonderful, Why Am I Still Single? Ten Strategies That Will Change Your Love Life Forever*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.

Plummer, Ken. *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.

Reynolds, Jill. *The Single Woman: A Discursive Investigation*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–660. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834.

Rich, Motoko. "Craving Freedom, Japan's Women Opt Out of Marriage." *The New York Times*, August 3, 2019. Accessed July 2, 2023. https://www.nytimes. com/2019/08/03/world/asia/japan-single-women-marriage.html.

Schulze, Laurie. "On the Muscle." In *Building Bodies*, edited by Pamela L. Moore, 9–30. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Sharma, Sarah. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

Srinivasan, Sharada, and Shuzhuo Li. "Unifying Perspectives on Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India." In *Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India: Macro Demographics versus Local Dynamics*, edited by Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li, 1–23. Cham: Springer, 2018.

Sun, Wanning. "From Poisonous Weeds to Endangered Species: Shenghuo TV, Media Ecology, and Stability Maintenance." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44, no. 2 (2015): 17–37.

Taylor, Anthea. *Single Women in Popular Culture: The Limits of Postfeminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Willse, Craig. "Surplus Life: The Neoliberal Making and Managing of Housing Insecurity." PhD diss., City University of New York, 2010.

Yamada, Masahiro. *After Parasite Singles: The Real Story Behind Japan's Marriage Crisis*. Na: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2014.

Yodovich, Neta, and Kinneret Lahad. "'I Don't Think This Woman Had Anyone in Her Life': Loneliness and Singlehood in *Six Feet Under*." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 4 (2018): 440–454. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506817702411.

Yoshida, Akiko. *Unmarried Women in Japan: The Drift into Singlehood*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Zhang, Jun, and Peidong Sun. "'When Are You Going to Get Married?' Parental Matchmaking and Middle-Class Women in Contemporary Urban China." In *Wives, Husbands, and Lovers: Marriage and Sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Urban China*, edited by Deborah S. Davis and Sara L. Friedman, 118–144. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.